

After many years of trying... Iowa man not giving up on state capital

It all started in 1989 when Weldon Vickrey, an energetic purple martin enthusiast from Atmore, Alabama successfully had his town named the state's Martin Capital. Since then others have followed his example and worked to have a designated martin capital, or in some cases two capitals, named in their state. The most recent state Purple Martin Capital added to the list was Adrian, Missouri. Melvin Smith of Adrian worked to get his town so named in 2003.

In the early 1960s, J.L. Wade along with his Trio Mfg. (now Nature House) plant and the Griggsville Wild Bird Society (now Nature Society) self-proclaimed Griggsville, Illinois as the Purple Martin Capital of the Nation.

Today, Griggsville remains the Nation's Purple Martin Capital. Not only because purple martins have been loyal by returning to Griggsville every year since the first aluminum housing was installed in 1962, the town boasts the first organized conservation effort in North America with its focus on one species.

From this grass roots beginning have sprung many purple martin organizations and martin housing manufacturers as well as other groups that are species oriented, such as the North American Bluebird Society.

Purple martins were nearing the endangered species list by 1960. In bringing the plight of the purple martin to the public, J.L. Wade helped start an unprecedented conservation movement.

Having a state martin capital designation is really all about the martins. With all the publicity, they are the winners. In the state of Iowa, an attempt to have a state martin capital named has turned into years of trying with little or no progress. But that's not to say the man behind this movement, Dennis Devine, is going to the sidelines. Quite the opposite.

Dennis Devine of Council Bluffs is a most prominent spokesman on behalf of purple martins and has worked tirelessly in sharing his martin knowledge with countless groups and individuals in

his area. Nearly every year a local paper does a story on Dennis which is followed by phone calls from interested citizens, to which he often becomes a mentor in helping them establish a colony of martins in their backyard.

It's been a long haul for Dennis and others in the state of Iowa to have a martin capital named. For a time, back in the '90s, a heated debate sprang up between Council Bluffs and the little town of Shelby. Both wanted the recognition; both unable to persuade the state's legislative body to declare a capital.

Following is a letter Dennis Devine submitted to Nature Society for printing in the News:

Capital for southwest Iowa 2006

Dear Nature Society News,

Here it is March of 2006. The purple martins will be here any day in Council Bluffs. They still do not have an official capital in Iowa to come to. It has been 16 years of trying to get it done the right way. The only state in the mid-west that doesn't have an official purple martin capital. Council Bluffs and Shelby both have trademarks.

But to be the capital of Iowa it has to go through the House and Senate in Des Moines as a resolution and be passed by both and then signed by the Governor. Then Griggsville, Illinois, Purple Martin Capital of the Nation, lists it in the Nature Society News. The News has been around since 1966. There are around 16 capitals in states where the martins come each year. I was responsible for having Omaha named the Purple Martin Capital of Nebraska in 1992. A PMC-24 Castle was donated to the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha.

Purple martins are the only species in the world almost totally dependent on man for nesting sites. Because of their dependency the only way for purple martins to expand the population is for people to put up more martin houses, and the only way for people

to find out about martins is to get publicity. Someone needs to get the word out.

This is where I come in. I have had an interest in birds, butterflies and animals since I was five years old. My first martin house was put up in 1972. I waited three years to get three birds. I learned all I could about them and I have a love for them as all landlords do.

I talk to a lot of purple martin landlords; I've sponsored four "It's Purple Martin Time" events in Council Bluffs.

In 1990 I asked Rep. Brent Siegrist to help make Council Bluffs the Purple Martin Capital of Iowa. Others who have assisted in this effort are the late Rep. Emil Pavich, Senator Mike Gronstad and former Rep. Linda Nelson.

Before I knew it Shelby got involved. For 16 years nothing has happened to get it done the right way. No official capital.

In 2004 Rep. Doug Struyk took up the banner to get Council Bluffs name capital. If we could not get Council Bluffs named, we would go for southwest Iowa. We tried that. Shelby did not want it that way either. So along the way Doug Struyk got a trademark for Council Bluffs.

The same that Shelby has. Ours is in marketing and business and Shelby's is in education and entertainment. It is not the right way but we are both on equal ground.

We still do not have an official purple martin capital in Iowa. In the end the martins are the winner because of the conflict between the two towns for around 16 years, they have gotten all kinds of press coverage — television, newspapers and even The Wall Street Journal.

The good thing is Shelby and Council Bluffs are taking care of the martins when they come here in March. All the towns in Iowa are.

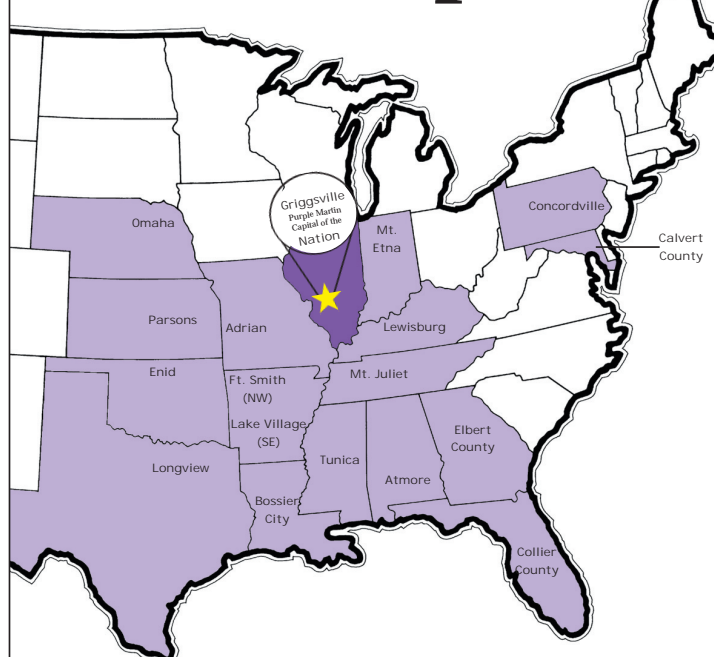
I hope we can get it done for a southwest Iowa capital in 2006.

For over 34 years I have been getting the word out on martins in the Nonpareil and World Herald and all people who ask me questions about this wonderful bird.

Thanks to all who have helped me.
Dennis Devine Sr.
Council Bluffs, Iowa

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Nonpareil and World Herald are local newspapers in Council Bluffs/Omaha.

Purple Martin State Capitals



Purple Martin State Capitals

- 1989**
ALABAMA, Atmore
- 1990**
KANSAS, Parsons
- 1991**
GEORGIA, Elbert County
OKLAHOMA, Enid
TENNESSEE, Mt Juliet
TEXAS, Longview
- 1992**
NEBRASKA, Omaha
- 1993**
ARKANSAS, Ft. Smith
(northwest capital)
ARKANSAS, Lake Village
(southeast capital)
INDIANA, Mt. Etna
- 1994**
FLORIDA, Collier County
LOUISIANA, Bossier City
- 1995**
KENTUCKY, Lewisburg
MARYLAND, Calvert County
- 1996**
MISSISSIPPI, Tunica
PENNSYLVANIA, Concordville
- 2003**
MISSOURI, Adrian